



NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

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www.SierraClub.org/NJ

May 28, 2013

Ms. Judith Enck, Administrator
US EPA Region 2
290 Broadway
New York, New York 10007-1866

Re: Remediation of Ringwood Mines Superfund Site

Dear Ms. Enck,

The Sierra Club strongly opposes the current plan for remediating the Ringwood Mines Superfund Site. We have been involved in efforts to clean up this site for long time. The EPA's proposed remediation plan will not achieve a thorough, complete clean up as paint sludge and other toxic materials will remain on site.

We disagree with the conclusion of Excel Environmental Resources of North Brunswick, which supports the use of capping on the site. Capping the site and utilizing institutional controls will fail. Those institutional controls will not work in the long term and the site will continue to impact the Upper Ringwood community, groundwater, and Highlands resources. As part of the Highlands preservation area, this site should be fully remediated to restore its functions as a mature upland forest that filters water for New Jersey's largest water supply reservoir.

The EPA has not required a full investigation in Peter's Mine and Canyon's Mine for contamination from the Ford dumping of toxic paint sludge. Before this investigation is completed we urge you not to sign off on a clean up plan. As someone who has intricate knowledge of the paint sludge contamination issue, we know Peter's Mine goes down over 2500 feet on a 56 degree angle and that there are lateral shafts approximately every 100 feet coming out from the main shaft throughout the mine. The shaft goes 1800 feet down and some of the shafts are more than a mile long. We know that below the large opening about 90 feet down there is a shelf with piles of sludge on it and the concern we have is that volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) and other compounds have moved down through the groundwater through the shafts and laterals and could be affecting a very wide area. We are also concerned as this is an area with a seasonally high water table and groundwater containing VOCs can rise through springs and fissures in rocks coming to the surface and potentially entering waterways. Not only does this contaminated water enter waterways but creates vapor intrusion problems. Even standing outdoors you can smell VOCs. Groundwater tests by the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission found actionable levels of a variety of VOCs. We are also concerned that chemicals in the groundwater can be pulled towards wells and other spheres of influence in the complex Highlands geology and hydrology. This is also a New Jersey designated Highlands water supply and an EPA Highlands Designated Sole Source Aquifer and the cleanup standards

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should be higher than capping and institutional controls. More studies need to be done before you sign off on the plan to determine how wide spread the contamination is. There needs to be a cleanup plan and we must not allow for natural attenuation to occur here.

Contrary to the assertions of Excel Environmental Resources, we believe the site needs to be cleaned up in its entirety and portions of the site should not be capped or used as a containment area. All institutional controls will fail at some point and to have a large volume of toxic and carcinogenic materials stored on site in an area that is near residents, above New Jersey's largest reservoir and in the Highlands Preservation area is something that should not be tolerated. As Highlands Preservation area, this land should be restored to its highest and best use, which is mature uplands to protect our watersheds. We believe other techniques like soil blending will not work here and Ford has had decades to do a more thorough cleanup. Given their track record the only clean up that will work is a complete clean up. The groundwater feeds into streams that are designated high quality waters that are either C1 designated and/or cold water fisheries designated and therefore the groundwater needs to be cleaned up to a much higher standard and not capped. Even areas that Ford has said have been remediated in the past turned out to continue to have piles of paint sludge. When we wanted to find additional piles of paint sludge all we had to do was take the Ford maps and wherever they said they had cleaned you could go and find more paint sludge.

North Jersey District Water Supply Commission has proposed pumping more water into the Wanaque Reservoir from intakes on the lower Passaic River. If this plan moves forward it would increase the impact pollution from the Upper Ringwood site has on the drinking water supply for the people of New Jersey.

When you look at the history and status of the site you will see the state acquired the property from Ford 1973. This plan to cap the site and use institutional controls constitutes a diversion of state parkland. Ford would have to go through the public diversion process and go before the State House Commission. This parkland belongs to the people of New Jersey and we are entitled to clean parkland, free of toxic pollution that is contained by institutional mechanisms that will fail over the years. This violates the public trust doctrine.

Upper Ringwood is designated by New Jersey as an Environmental Justice community. We believe this community has received a disproportionate share of pollution not only from Ford Motor Company but also the landfill, power lines and gas lines. We believe the failure to do a complete and proper cleanup violates the EPA principles of Environmental Justice. You would never allow on a site this toxic the same capping and institutional controls if this was happening in Ridgewood or Alpine. On the other hand Ford would not have dumped toxic paint sludge in Ridgewood or Alpine in the first place.

This is a community that hunts, fishes, grows their own food, and lives off land. Failure to clean up the ground water and streams on this site will mean more toxic chemicals will be impacting the community.

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I have personally been involved in environmental issues in the Ringwood community for the last couple of decades. As a former chairman of the Ringwood Environmental Commission, we opposed the removal of this site from the National Priority List by the EPA, because according to EPA, the site was cleaned up. In the early to mid 1960's, Ford Motor Company wanted to develop this area into a new town with garden apartments, shopping centers and a light industrial park. The development was fought and defeated by the community, including my family, when the state refused to approve a sewer plant that would dump directly into the reservoir. So in 1967, Ford Motor Company started dumping paint sludge from its Mahwah plant and also, I believe, waste and whole machine parts from its Edgewater plant that had recently closed at that time. In 1979, I was part of the first tour with the EPA showing contamination on the site. In 1992, and again in 1997 and 1998, I personally took the EPA on a tour of the site, showing areas that were supposedly cleaned up, still having paint sludge. At most of these tours, there were also representatives from DEP. In 1998, I got the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission (NJDWSC) to take water samples from springs on the site showing all types of contamination including lead, volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) and a witch's brew of others.

If you are not going to clean up the site completely and allow the community to be whole again, Ford Motor Company should provide funding to buy the community out and provide residents with adequate compensation to live somewhere else. However we would prefer the site be adequately cleaned up and residents should be able to continue living on sites their families have lived on for generations. This community deserves a proper and complete clean up.

The EPA should do what is in the best interest of the people of Upper Ringwood, not what is in the best financial interest of Ford Motor Company. This cleanup plan is an Edsel.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Jeff Tittel
Director, New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club

Cc: Lisa Plevin, Chief of Staff, US EPA Region 2
Walter Mugdan, Director of the Division of Environmental Planning and Protection, US EPA Region 2